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ABSTRACT

This report discusses specific findings of a review of language training and requirements in the Department of Defense. It contains: (1) a letter to the Secretary of Defense from the Office of the Comptroller General of the U.S.; (2) an Appendix giving a description of the Defense Language Institute and an outline of areas that need improvement; and (3) a letter from the Department of Defense. The problems noted deal with the language skills attained by personnel, the assignment of personnel to language essential positions, criteria used to identify positions requiring foreign language skills, and requirements and testing for language proficiency. The five recommendations made to the Department of Defense are outlined. These deal with: (1) a review of procedures for selecting and assigning personnel to language essential positions; (2) criteria for identifying positions requiring foreign language skills; (3) a review of procedures for getting an overview of the degree to which language requirements are being met; (4) periodic retesting of language proficient personnel; and (5) recommendations regarding the Command Language Program. (AMH)

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REPORT OF THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

Need To Improve Foreign Language Training Programs And Assignments For Department Of Defense Personnel

The Department of Defense requires a large number of personnel with foreign language skills and conducts an extensive language training program to meet this need.

GAO's January 1973 report identified several areas where the Department needed to improve its language training program and assignment procedures. This report notes that similar conditions continue to exist.

GAO is recommending that the Department take certain actions to improve its assignment procedures and language training program.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

INTERNATIONAL DIVISION

B-176049

The Honorable
The Secretary of Defense

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We have reviewed the Department of Defense's progress in responding to our January 22, 1973, report to the Congress, "Need to Improve Language Training Programs and Assignments for U.S. Government Personnel Overseas," (B-176049). That report addressed the language requirements, training programs, and language-related staffing for several Federal departments and agencies and contained recommendations for improving them.

This review and our 1973 report made only limited observations of Defense intelligence positions requiring language proficiency--especially those in security service operations--because of their specialized nature and the extraordinary security classification of related information. Therefore, although most of our comments refer to a relatively small portion of Defense's language-essential positions, observations on such factors as language training and proficiency testing at the Defense Language Institute apply to the entire Defense language program.

It has long been recognized that foreign language capabilities are essential to the effective accomplishment of certain missions by elements of the Defense Department. This recognition is evidenced by the Department's extensive foreign language training program.

Our earlier review noted that, because of inadequate criteria for determining and reviewing the validity of language requirements, inadequate measurement of language proficiency skills, and other problems, Defense was not satisfactorily meeting certain of its overseas language requirements. Also, the Defense Language Institute had been unable to achieve technical control over foreign language training activities within Defense, primarily because authority and responsibility for conducting these training activities needed clarification.

Our followup review showed that many problems cited in our 1973 report continue to exist. Specific findings are discussed briefly below.

A number of personnel assigned to language essential positions at the overseas activities we visited did not have the required language skills. For example, only 37 percent of the incumbents at the Military Assistant Advisory Groups visited had the required language capabilities. We noted similar situations at military police groups, Defense Attache offices, and other military units. The impact of assigning personnel who lack required language skills to language essential positions is not readily quantifiable. However, many incumbents stated they were not as effective in their work as they could be because they did not have the required language skills.

Personnel were assigned to language essential positions although they lacked the appropriate language skills because they did not (1) receive language training before being assigned, (2) have time to complete training, or (3) achieve desired proficiency levels after completing training.

The criteria used to identify positions requiring foreign language skills needs to be improved. We believe the criteria provided to local commanders to assist them in identifying language essential positions is too general and does not provide a uniform basis for designating language essential positions. Consequently, we question whether language proficiency requirements for certain military activities reflect actual needs.

Other problems noted were that (1) information on the degree to which language essential positions are appropriately staffed was lacking, (2) the Services' personnel language proficiency inventory data was not up-to-date, and (3) Defense's language proficiency tests do not measure speaking skills. Also, the Defense Language Institute, despite changes made since our 1973 report, had not achieved technical control over Defense's foreign language training activities.

To help alleviate some of these problems we recommend that you direct Department of Defense components to:

1. Review their procedures for selecting foreign language training candidates and for assigning personnel to language essential positions.

2. Establish more detailed criteria to help local commanders identify positions requiring foreign language skills.

3. Review current procedures for determining whether the Department has an adequate overview of the degree to which language requirements are being satisfactorily met.

4. Implement procedures for ensuring periodic retesting of language proficient personnel.

5. Reemphasize responsibilities for complying with regulations governing the Command Language Programs. In doing so, a more precise definition of these programs would be helpful. Also, the service program manager concept should be reviewed to identify and correct the weaknesses which inhibit effective coordination between the Defense Language Institute and Command Language Programs.

Appendix I contains detailed examples of our findings and recommendations.

We also noted that the Department had taken steps to coordinate foreign language training and research on a Government-wide basis and that a number of actions are being initiated through an interagency language roundtable forum. We believe such cooperation is necessary to improve interagency coordination of foreign language training and research, and we endorse the roundtable's continuing efforts.

We have received comments from the Department of Defense on the matters covered in this report and they are incorporated as appendix II. The Department said in part that our review of this program was most helpful, and also stated that our comments, observations, data and findings correctly reflect the recent status of those portions of the Defense language program that were reviewed. In addition, the Department generally concurred in the basic thrust of our recommendations.

Section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions he has taken on our recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report. We shall appreciate receiving copies of your statements to the Committees on actions taken.

We are sending copies of this report to the above named Committees, to the Chairmen of the Senate and House Committees on Armed Services, and to the Director, Office of Management and Budget.

Sincerely yours,

J. K. Fasick

J. K. Fasick
Director

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NEED TO IMPROVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMS AND ASSIGNMENTS FOR DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PERSONNEL

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Defense, primarily because of its intelligence responsibilities, requires more personnel with foreign language capabilities than any other Government activity. The Services estimated that 10,200 military positions require foreign language proficiency and that 42,000 military personnel are at least partially proficient in foreign languages.

The Defense Language Institute at the Presidio of Monterey, California, is responsible for managing the Defense Department's foreign language training programs. Individual Services and Defense agencies determine who will be trained, which languages will be taught, and how the personnel will be used. Procedures and responsibilities for managing the programs are set forth in Joint Service Regulation AR 350-20/ OPNAVINST 1550.7/AFR 50-40/MCO 1550.4B.

During fiscal year 1975, Defense had about 5,400 military personnel enrolled in foreign language training programs through the Institute, about 4 percent of them at the Department of State's Foreign Service Institute. Army and Air Force personnel represented about 84 percent of the enrollment, and about 86 percent of all students were enlisted personnel. Institute operating costs and estimated student salaries were about $27.6 million.

The Institute trains students to achieve particular language proficiency levels in order to satisfactorily perform duties as members of military attache offices, Military Assistance Advisory Groups, and security services or intelligence units. Each course has specific listening, speaking, reading, and writing skill levels, described by Defense as follows.

Proficiency level	Description
0	No practical proficiency
1	Elementary proficiency
2	Limited working proficiency
3	Minimum professional proficiency
4	Full professional proficiency
5	Native/bilingual proficiency

The objective of most Defense Language Institute courses is to train students to a level 3 proficiency.

Foreign language training is also provided at the command level. Command Language Programs are usually designed to provide refresher or elementary proficiency level training. These programs are established and conducted by the commands; however, such things as course content and objectives must be approved by the Defense Language Institute.

Our January 1973 report to the Congress 1/ addressed language requirements, training programs, and language-related staffing for several Federal departments and agencies and recommended improvements. At that time, we found that language essential positions at certain overseas locations were not adequately staffed, criteria for identifying foreign language requirements were not adequate, language proficiency tests needed to be improved, and the Defense Language Institute lacked adequate technical control over Command Language Programs. Our followup review showed that these conditions continue to exist.

We made this review at the headquarters level in Washington, D.C., and at the Defense Language Institute. We also visited France, Germany, Italy, Greece, Poland, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Thailand. We talked with Military Attaches assigned to the Embasssies and with military personnel, mostly Army, stationed in the countries. Improvements needed in the foreign language training program are discussed below.

POSITIONS NOT SATISFACTORILY STAFFED

We reviewed the language essential positions of Military Assistance Advisory Groups, Defense Attache offices, military police groups, and other military units. Incumbents in many

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1/"Need to Improve Language Training Programs and Assignments for U.S. Government Personnel Overseas," Jan. 22, 1973, (B-176049).

of these positions did not have the required language skills. Although the effect of this situation is not readily quantifiable, a number of incumbents stated that it reduced their effectiveness.

Military Assistance Advisory Groups

We visited Military Assistance Advisory Groups in Saudi Arabia, Greece, Italy, France, Germany, Thailand, Korea, and Taiwan. Of the 169 language essential positions identified for these groups, only 37 percent were staffed by personnel having the required language skills. For example, only 39 of the 89 occupied language essential positions in Thailand and none of the 23 in Saudi Arabia were staffed by personnel having the required language skills.

Officials told us that, with minor exceptions, the lack of language skills did not affect their groups' abilities to perform their assigned duties. As discussed later, it appears that language requirements for some positions in these groups may have been overstated and should be reevaluated.

Defense Attache offices

One or more Defense Attaches were assigned to the Embassy in each country we visited. At that time, only 64 percent (or 36) of these Attaches had the language skills required for their positions.

Several of the attache officers believed they were inefficient or not fully productive because of their lack of language capability. For example, officers stated that adequate speaking skills were needed to effectively communicate with host-country officials and to gather information. One officer believed language skills were so important he would rather have an attache position vacant than occupied by an incumbent lacking the necessary language skills.

U.S. Army, Europe

At the time of our review, the U.S. Army, Europe, had identified 805 positions as language essential. The Army's European headquarters does not maintain information on whether these positions are staffed by language proficient presonnel and explained that this information is maintained by local commanders.

We visited several subordinate commands in Europe and noted that a number of positions identified as requiring language capability were staffed by personnel having less

than the required language skills. A military police customs group had 86 incumbents in language essential positions but only 44 percent of them had the required language skills. Officials of one of this group's units said that it had 14 language essential positions but did not know the proficiency levels required nor the language capabilities of the incumbents. Officials of the Group Headquarters stated that the Group's overall language requirements were valid and incumbents lacking the required language skills were less efficient than those who did have such skills.

Another military unit had language requirements for 24 positions, only 13 of which were staffed by personnel having the required language skills. Unit officials said the lack of language skills made it more difficult to perform certain of their duties.

Far East military activities

The several military units we reviewed in the Far East had a total requirement of 305 language essential positions, of which about 50 percent were staffed by personnel not having the required language skills. In the Army, about 75 percent of the personnel in language essential positions in the units reviewed did not have the required language skills. In one case, an Army activity had 127 language essential positions, but only 12 percent of them were staffed by personnel having the required language skills.

Naval and Air Force activities we reviewed accounted for 110 of the 305 language essential positions, and over 95 percent were staffed by personnel having the required skills.

INAPPROPRIATE ASSIGNMENTS TO LANGUAGE ESSENTIAL POSITIONS

Personnel in language essential positions normally lacked the required language skills because they did not attend language training before assignment or did not achieve the required proficiency level during training. Based on our observations at overseas activities and at the Defense Language Institute, both situations were fairly common.

Training before assignment

According to a Joint Service Regulation, assignment of personnel to language essential positions should be made enough in advance to allow adequate time for language training. Incumbents in many language essential positions we

reviewed had not attended language training before assignment and others had received only partial instruction. At one Military Assistance Advisory Group, 9 of the 23 personnel in language essential positions had received no language training before assignment. At another Advisory Group, 26 of the 67 incumbents in Army language essential positions had not attended language training before being assigned. In another instance, more than half of 48 incumbents in language essential positions in a miliary police group in Europe had neither the necessary language skills nor preassignment language training.

The reason most frequently cited by overseas personnel for not attending or completing language training was inadequate time allowed for training prior to their new assignments. A number of Military Assistance Advisory Groups and Defense Attache officers in language essential positions told us they lacked sufficient language skills because they were transferred from training to their assignments before completing the language courses.

Military spokesmen in Washington told us it normally takes about 18 months to 2 years to requisition, select, train, and station personnel overseas. Unforeseen events, such as the establishment of new language requirements, unanticipated personnel changes, and student attrition, disrupt the normal assignment training cycle. Although we recognize that unforeseen events do occur, we believe assignment planning and projections of training requirements should be improved to reduce the incidence of inadequate staffing of language essential positions.

Proficiency levels

Many personnel completed training at the Defense Language Institute but did not achieve the proficiency level required for their positions. In 1974, for example, 107 of 267 students (about 40 percent) in 9 courses attained neither reading nor listening goals. Defense proficiency tests do not measure speaking skills, so we could not determine whether graduates whose positions required speaking ability were sufficiently trained.

Failure to achieve course objectives may be due to unrealistic objectives in relation to the length of the training courses, enrollment of students who have low scores on language aptitude tests, and/or course formats and instruction materials. We were told that weaknesses in the proficiency tests make it difficult to determine whether course goals are actually being achieved.

Institute officials were aware of the problems and were seeking solutions. They identified several courses for which student aptitude requirements should be increased and proposed that the Services consider this when selecting personnel for training. At the time our review was completed, only the Army had agreed to use the more stringent aptitude criteria.

Defense Language Institute and other military officials believed that little could be done to lengthen the time spent in language training. They said additional training was considered unreasonable, primarily because of the limited service commitment of enlisted personnel.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Defense components to review their procedures for selecting foreign language training candidates and for assigning personnel to language essential positions. Emphasis should be given to insuring that practices and procedures allow adequate time for training before assignments to language essential positions.

LACK OF CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING LANGUAGE ESSENTIAL POSITIONS

An important factor in staffing of language essential positions is the need to develop accurate requirements for these positions. Our January 1973 report recommended that Defense establish adequate criteria for identifying positions which require foreign language capabilities. In commenting on this recommendation, Defense said it intended to review existing criteria to determine whether improvements were needed. However, during this followup review, we observed that local commanders were still being given only general criteria. This observation does not apply to intelligence-related positions, such as those for translators and interrogators, for which language skills are generally implicit in the nature of the position. Many language designations for the non-intelligence positions reviewed were based on subjective judgments of local commanders. In the absence of criteria, it was difficult to fully evaluate decisions regarding these language essential positions, but our work indicated that some of the determinations might not accurately reflect job-related needs.

According to a Joint Service Regulation, each Service and Defense agency is responsible for establishing its own requirements for language essential positions. Officers overseas said that local unit commanders are responsible

for determining linguist requirements and that skill level definitions contained in Service regulations were the only guidance usually provided. These definitions are helpful in selecting the desired levels of proficiency but do not help local commanders in deciding whether language skills are needed to perform specific functions.

Lack of uniform criteria may result in both overstatement and understatement of actual needs and the higher commands have no consistent basis for reviewing lower command determinations of language needs. For example, numerous Military Assistance Advisory Group officers said some officers fully proficient in the host-country language were needed in each Group but not as many as were currently authorized. They believed that, as a result, some personnel were being trained unnecessarily. On the other hand, a few officers in military units told us the number of language essential positions and proficiencies required in their units were understated in light of the lack of language proficient personnel and the high costs of language training.

Because local commanders use different standards, the number and types of positions designated as language essential may fluctuate when the command changes. One commander in Europe told us he recently requested that language essential positions in his unit be reduced from 17 to 5 because he believed language skills were not necessary for all 17 positions. This commander assumed that his predecessor used a different criteria for identifying language requirements. In another instance, a command in Thailand reassessed its language needs shortly after our review and reduced language essential positions from 97 to 77, or by 21 percent. Also, 85 percent of the remaining positions were downgraded to require lesser language skill levels, thus reducing the required training for most positions from 47 to 37 weeks.

Since these decisions were based on subjective judgments, we had no basis on which to assess their reasonableness without making an exhaustive analysis of missions, available resources, and other factors. We believe officials of higher commands would have similar problems when evaluating language requirements.

In our opinion, Defense has made little if any improvement in establishing criteria for designating language essential positions. We believe Defense activities need to better define the basis for their language requirements to insure that only mission-essential foreign language training is provided and all valid requirements are recognized.

Recommendation

To improve the staffing and determination of requirements for language essential positions, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct Defense components to establish more detailed criteria to help local commanders identify positions requiring foreign language skills. This is particularly necessary for non-intelligence-related positions for which language requirements are not as easily identified.

MONITORING OF LANGUAGE ESSENTIAL POSITIONS NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED

An apparent weakness in Defense's management of language essential positions is the lack of information on the degree to which these positions are appropriately staffed.

Overseas Command Headquarters, such as U.S. Army, Europe, and U.S. Navy, Europe, do not maintain overall data on the extent to which language essential positions are appropriately staffed. Army and Air Force officials in Washington, D.C., stated they did not have such data readily available and it would be difficult to develop, particularly for enlisted personnel. Navy and Marine officials said they did have the data available but it was not reported on a routine basis. Officials of all the Services said this data was not necessary at Headquarters and overseas command levels because local commanders were in the best position to evaluate language capabilities and identify problems. They stated that, if local commands did not have adequate language capabilities in their activities, higher commands would be alerted to the problem.

We agreed that local commanders are in the best position to evaluate their language capabilities and requirements but we believe that aggregate data on the staffing of language essential positions for major commands and individual Services would be beneficial. Such information would be useful to managers when evaluating existing language capabilities and future requirements. It would also serve to measure the extent to which language requirements for the Services and their various elements are being met and to identify priority training requirements.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct Defense components to review current procedures for determining whether the Department has an adequate overview of the degree to which language requirements are being satisfactorily met.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY DATA DEFICIENT

The Army's language proficiency data was not up to date, and the accuracy of the Services' data was questionable. As pointed out in our 1973 report, managers need accurate proficiency scores to assist them in making assignments.

Language capabilities inventory

The Army and Air Force have mandatory retesting programs for their language proficient personnel. Army regulations require retesting every 2 years, and the Air Force uses a 3-year retesting period. A Navy official told us that no mandatory retesting program has been established for linguists.

We checked the currency of language proficiency data for Army personnel assigned to Europe. Only about 16 percent of the approximately 4,500 personnel listed as having at least an elementary level of proficiency had been tested within the previous 26 months, despite the regulation's 2 year retesting provision. Many of the scores were 5 to 10 years old.

Retesting is especially important when assigning personnel to language essential positions in order to determine whether an individual is qualified for a position and to identify refresher training needs.

Language tests

Defense uses the Defense Language Proficiency Test, which covers only listening and reading abilities, to measure foreign language skills. Speaking skills, although required for some language essential positions, are derived by extrapolation from measured skills. The Defense Language Institute acknowledges that the accuracy of oral proficiency ratings is questionable. The proficiency tests are general and do not measure achievement of specific course and job objectives, such as dialect classification or aural translation. Furthermore, Institute officials stated that Defense's desired proficiency levels are too broad to be satistically measured and that it is not possible to assure the accuracy of relating the test scores to general skill levels, such as limited working or minimum professional proficiency.

The Institute is currently working on these problems and trying to devise reliable and administratively feasible tests for measuring speaking skills and attainment of specific course objectives. During our review, it was considering whether to change the proficiency test scoring system so as to more accurately reflect skill levels achieved.

Recommendation

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct Defense components to implement procedures for assuring periodic retesting of language proficient personnel and emphasize the need for testing before assigning personnel to language essential positions.

BETTER CONTROL NEEDED OVER COMMAND-SPONSORED LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

Some military commands operate local language programs. A Joint Service Regulation provides for the Defense Language Institute to exercise technical control over these programs, stating that:

> "Technical control is defined as the authority to establish, develop, approve, and administer language training standards for the DLP [Defense Language Program]. These standards are applicable to--(a) Language training methodologies, (b) Course content and objectives, (c) Tests and measurements of language aptitudes and proficiency skill levels, (d) Instructor qualifications. * * * Technical control enables the Director, DLI [Defense Language Institute] to exercise quality management of the DLP."

Despite the revision of regulations which clarified responsibilities and created service program managers to act as liaisons between the Institute and the Command Language Programs in each Service, the Institute still does not have technical control over the programs.

Institute officials were unable to tell us how many Command Language Programs were operating. They estimated there were 85 "known or potential" command programs and said they had approved only 9 of them. They stated that the service program managers had not submitted the complete information needed to identify and approve the programs and that the Institute had not been sufficiently funded in the past to carry out its Command Language Program responsibilities.

Service program managers did not have complete, up-to-date information on local language programs. One program manager and several Institute officials said it was difficult to determine what is and what is not a Command Language Program. These programs are defined as any language training program or course of instruction operated by an active duty or reserve component, exclusive of Institute Training

Branches, the Service Academies, Defense overseas dependent schools, the Security Assistance English Language Program, and programs conducted strictly for the purpose of attaining academic credit. Despite the broad definition, we were told some military commands did not consider their language programs to be in this category and thus did not report them as such. During our visits to overseas locations, we identified several unreported local language programs which were generally small, voluntarily attended sessions designed to orient military personnel to the basics of a foreign language.

The U.S. Army, Europe, operated the largest Command Language Program we reviewed. In fiscal year 1975, it reported a direct cost of $1,265,500 for local language training of about 65,000 people. Available information indicated that the Defense Language Institute was aware of and had approved the program. U.S. Army, Europe, coordination with the Institute has been facilitated by the fact that the official responsible for administering that command's language program was also the Institute's technical representative in Europe.

The Institute's technical control over Command Language Programs needs to be improved, and the service program manager concept may not be effective.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Secretary of Defense reemphasize to Defense components their responsibilities for complying with Command Language Program regulations. In doing so, a more precise definition of Command Language Programs would be helpful. Also, the service program manager concept should be reviewed to identify and correct the weaknesses which inhibit effective coordination between the Defense Language Institute and the Command Language Programs.

APPENDIX II

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS

SEP 30, 1976

Mr. J. K. Fasick, Director
International Division
U. S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fasick:

This is in reply to your letter to Secretary Donald Rumsfeld regarding the General Accounting Office draft report on "Need to Improve Foreign Language Training Programs and Assignments for Department of Defense Personnel", dated July 6, 1976, (OSD Case #4403).

The comments, observations, data, and findings of the draft report correctly reflect the recent status of those portions of the Defense Language Program that were reviewed. The majority of the assignment problems identified result from the interface between Service Personnel Management Systems and a highly perishable special skill training program where priorities for language training and assignment create anomalies with other officer and enlisted personnel requirements. The new DoD anti-turbulence personnel assignment policies, which were implemented during FY 1976, will help to reduce these and other problems, but their beneficial effect on personnel utilization, the language training pipeline, the trainee, and the field activities will not be fully realized for several years.

The basic thrust of the recommendations contained in the draft report are generally concurred in; however, several recommendations will require additional review in order to determine appropriate long term corrective action. The status of some recent actions to improve the Defense Language Program is as follows:

1) The Army Linguist Personnel Study completed in January 1976 resulted in the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army approving 83 specific recommendations for improvement in the program within Army and at the Defense Language Institute.

2) A review of the functions of the Command Language Program, the English Language Program, and Executive Agent responsibilities is in progress to improve responsiveness and determine the feasibility of a shift in management responsibility.

(See GAO Note)

The General Accounting Office's review of this important program was most helpful. The continuing effort by the Services and the Defense Department to resolve the issues contained in your recommendations should result in improved management of this valuable program.

Sincerely,

David P. Taylor

David P. Taylor
Assistant Secretary of Defense
(Manpower & Reserve Affairs).

GAO Note: Paragraph deleted which dealt with classified matters.